

**Policy:** 21-001 (Revised Apr 03)

**Subject:** Conference - Meals / Light refreshments

**Reference(s):** 5 U.S.C. 5702 (federal employees), 5 U.S.C. 5703 (experts, consultants; individuals serving without pay), 37 U.S.C. 404 (military members), JFTR U2550 (military members), JTR C4950 (DoD civilian employees)

**Definition(s):** Conference: A meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium or event that involves attendee travel.  
Light refreshments: Items such as coffee, tea, juice, soft drinks, donuts, bagels, fruit, cookies, pretzels, chips, muffins and similar type items to be served at morning, afternoon or evening breaks.

The circumstances under which meals / light refreshments can be authorized using appropriated funds (APF) are limited and must meet certain conditions.

General:

- As a general rule, APF cannot be used to provide meals / light refreshments to government employees at their official duty station.

Travel:

- Personnel on official government travel are entitled to meals and incidental expenses (MI&E) paid from APF because there is specific statutory authority to do so (5 U.S.C. 5702, 5 U.S.C. 5703, and 37 U.S.C. 404).
  - Government-provided meals can be funded centrally (with no cost to the attendee) or can be included in a registration fee, but must be at or below the applicable per diem rate for the breakfast, lunch or dinner.
  - Employees on TDY travel may be served meals but cannot be reimbursed for those provided at government expense. When meals are provided at nominal or no cost by the government or included in the registration fee, the applicable MI&E will be reduced. This should be clarified in advance and the appropriate per diem meal(s) allowance be annotated and reduced on the individual's travel orders.

Conferences:

- When you are hosting a conference the above rules apply.
  - GAO has rescinded the previous GSA ruling that light refreshments could be provided to all conference attendees if 51% or more attendees were in a travel status.

All receipts for reimbursement from APF for the above purchases must be accompanied by a breakdown of attendees that are in an official travel status and a signed statement from the program manager certifying;

"This request supports a mission essential function. It is understood that only those individuals in a funded travel status are eligible to be provided meals or light refreshments at government expense. Individuals on funded travel whose meals were provided centrally were advised that they should not also seek reimbursement for the meal(s) when they file their travel claim. Individuals not in a funded travel status paid for meals / light refreshments with personal funds."

If you cannot meet the criteria above, you must determine how you will collect and pay for (without the use of APF) the meals / light refreshment costs or reconsider providing meals / light refreshments.